The Platform Promise
By Jonathan Olvera

The sun hung like a molten coin over the river valley, spilling gold across the jagged walls of the quarry. Dust rose in shimmering veils, clinging to skin, hair, and lungs. The river below caught the light in glints, but up here, on the broad terraces where the stone was cut, it was heat, stone, and sweat.

“I’ve seen it done, White!” I called over the rhythmic clink of chisels and the scrape of steel on diorite. My co-worker, White, was adjusting a chain sling on one of the larger blocks. His uniform, neat as always, clung to his shoulders with damp patches from the afternoon labor.

He turned, eyebrows lifting. “I believe in it,” he replied, as if he’d already weighed the idea in his mind and found it worth the gamble. He didn’t ask what “it” was. We’d been talking for weeks now about my idea — my little rebellion disguised as agriculture.

I was twenty-three, Spanish-Nazarene by birth, wearing the green trousers and dark shirt of the Sonora labor corps. My boots were cracked from the stone dust, my palms calloused into thick leather from months of quarry work. But under the noise and repetition, I was always rehearsing. Not just the work orders of the day, but my pitch.

“This quarry isn’t everything,” I told him, scanning the neat lines of cut stone, each block fitted to its twin in the pattern the engineers dictated. The officers loved their symmetry. They claimed it was “imperial discipline,” but it felt more like chains.

White gave a faint smile, the kind you give when you already know the next line. “I also ponder.”

“Food production,” I said, leaning on my mallet. “And the collection of seeds.”

“It’s all good work,” White said mildly.

“I have a better idea.” I could hear my own eagerness sharpening my voice.

We were standing in one of the lower terraces where the diorite met a seam of sodium-rich stone. The officers kept an eye on how the patterns were laid — the blocks must match their grand design, a geometric harmony meant to impress senators and merchants alike. But I saw something else: resources. Minerals for soil. Heat storage for winter crops. The seeds of my plan were right under my boots.

“I have lots of foolish ideas,” White said, settling his weight against a block as if to rest. “Really, I have time to listen. I like working on things.”

His patience was one of the reasons I kept talking to him. He never rushed me, even when the foremen barked orders.

“To make food,” I said again, as if repeating it could make it more real.

“Do you think they would let you?” White asked, his tone flat but not unkind. He meant the authorities — the garden masters of the Sonora, who kept a tight grip on all food production in the desert. To plant without permission was to invite punishment. And yet…

“I can’t simply be a day laborer,” I said. “Soon I will accomplish all things.”

“I’ve been there before,” he replied, his voice softer now, as if admitting to old dreams.

“Our method,” I continued, “on the platform. That is the promise.” I was rehearsing again — the words I’d use before a panel of officers or merchants, words meant to sound practical, not dangerous.

“I believe in it,” White said again, his affirmation simple and solid as the blocks we cut.

“I want to do it,” I told him. “I want to make a new formula for food production — it would change everything.”

White frowned slightly. “It is something that some people might take as cruel or overbearing.”

“Spare me,” I laughed. “We’ve talked about it.”

He tilted his head. “Do you have plans to do something?”

“No one likes to lose, and no one likes to look like a fool,” I said, adjusting my gloves. “Things aren’t always visible or obvious. It’s going to take time to assemble the whole thing.”

“That sounds interesting,” he said, and I knew he meant it.

Months I’d been thinking — about the quarry, the stone, the river, the way heat baked into certain minerals. Diorite was dense, sodium stone could leach salts into soil. In the right proportions, you could make a planter that fed itself. No need for imported fertilizer, no dependency on the garden masters. Just a block of stone and a handful of seeds.

“In better times,” White said, more to himself than to me.

“If you can assist me,” I said, “that is what we will do.”

“What else is there to do?” he asked with a small shrug.

“Sure,” he added after a pause.

The day wore on. The sun dragged its way toward the far cliffs, shadows creeping up the quarry walls. The officers paced along the upper platforms, watching, always watching. We cut, we hauled, we laid the blocks into place like pieces in a puzzle none of us had designed.

When the bells finally rang, their clang echoing off stone, the great gates at the river docks swung open. Work was done for the day.

“It is time now!” White shouted, unhooking his harness.

“Let’s get out of here!” I answered, yanking off my gloves and dusting the grit from my boots.

“I am like him!” I said to no one in particular, raising my voice over the shuffle of departing workers. “I put all my trust in him!”

“Amen!” White called back, grinning.

“Thank you very much — for your service,” I told him.

“Good afternoon to you as well,” he said, heading for the gate.

We parted ways there. I lingered a moment, stretching the tight cords of muscle in my arms, rolling my shoulders against the knots. “Blah, blah,” I muttered to myself, mocking the officers’ endless lectures about pattern and order.

“Gathering stone,” I said aloud, tasting the words. “Mind your diet. Let’s have one.”

Silly ideas. And yet, not so silly if they worked.

The path home wound along the river’s edge, the quarry’s stone face looming behind me. I kept my eyes on the water, watching how the current shifted where the ships docked. That was another piece of it — the river could bring not just stone, but soil, silt, seeds from upriver farms. If the right stones were arranged in the right pattern, the river could feed the blocks, the blocks could feed the plants, and the plants… well, they could feed the people.

The import and the new location is a work of science, I thought. Not the kind of science the officers cared for — theirs was the science of control, of keeping hands and mouths dependent. Mine was the science of release.

I had always been inspired by the Sonora — the red horizons, the cactus blossoms after a rare rain, the whisper of wind between stones. The possibilities were

endless. Endless if one could avoid the gaze of those who claimed ownership over every stalk and seed.

“Well, I can’t wait to get to it,” I murmured, a smile breaking across my face.

I gave thanks, as I always did, for the hands at work and the feet on the stones. For White, patient and unshaken. For the old masons who taught me to read the grain in a block, to listen for the clean ring of a true cut. And for the ones who had come before us — ancestors and perished folk, buried in the dust of older quarries, whose names were never written but whose work still stood.

There’s nothing else more truthful and righteous, I thought. And that was the truth that would carry me forward — through the quarry gates, through the watching eyes, and into the work that could change everything.